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FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
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INFO RUEHK/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 2225
RUEHB/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 7550
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1804
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 7433
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 3491
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 1954
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 2993
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L ISLAMABAD 004092

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TAGS: PTER PGOV PK

SUBJECT: BIN LADEN'S CALL TO ARMS FALLS FLAT

REF: ISLAMABAD 3027

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: On September 20, al-Qaeda leaders released two new tapes calling for Pakistanis to wage holy war against President Musharraf in retaliation for the Red Mosque operation in July. The government has dismissed the threats and vowed to continue its counter-terrorism strategy. It is too early to judge the long-term effect of the tapes on military operations but, so far, the tapes have sparked little interest in a populace focused on upcoming elections. End summary.

¶2. (C) On September 20, Al-Qaeda leader Usama bin Laden released a new audio message calling on Muslims in Pakistan to wage holy war against President Musharraf, his government, and his army. He called President Musharraf an apostate for storming the Red Mosque (Lal Masjid) in Islamabad in July 2007 (REFTEL). A related tape was also released by al-Qaeda's Ayman al-Zawahiri also calling for jihad against President Musharraf and his army. He described the killing of Red Mosque leader Maulana Ghazi and the demolition of the attached madrassa as "soaking the history of the Pakistani army in shame which can only be washed away by retaliation against the killers of Ghazi."

¶3. (C) The official government response to the tapes has been largely dismissive. Military spokesman Major General Waheed Arshad confirmed the armed forces' continued commitment to fighting extremists and terrorists. He said that despite any threats or insults, the whole nation of Pakistan was supportive of the fight against terrorism and with the army. Arshad also confirmed that there would be no change in policy in response to bin Laden's newest video.

¶4. (C) Though the tapes have been front page news in Western press, the stories barely made the news in Pakistan. News about the tapes has been slow to appear on Pakistani news channels and did not make the front pages of most Urdu and English-language newspapers in Pakistan. The public response has been largely non-existent and most commentators are dismissing this as another in the long line of bin Laden tapes. Islamabad news today was dominated by Supreme Court cases about President Musharraf's re-election eligibility and the recent announcement of presidential election dates (SEPTEL).

¶5. (SBU) Unrelated to the al-Qaeda tapes, a few hundred madrassa students are protesting outside the Red Mosque today in Islamabad. They are demanding that the government re-open the mosque for Friday prayers and special Ramadan prayers. The police continue to surround the area near the mosque and the protests have remained peaceful.

¶6. (C) Comment: Bin Laden carefully chose his references. The Red Mosque operation remains a contentious issue here as liberals believe the President took too long to react, extremists remain outraged, and the majority who oppose terrorism were nonetheless uncomfortable with a military operation against a mosque. It is too early to judge the long-term effects of the video on military operations, but for now Pakistanis are more focused on the upcoming elections. End Comment.

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